

House Local Government Committee

HB 137

Opponent Testimony

October 29th 2025

Chair King, Vice-Chair Kishman, Ranking Member Sims, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 137. My name is Bryan Howard, and I serve as the Director of the Delaware County District Library. We proudly serve a growing and diverse community across Delaware County through five branches and extensive outreach services. Our mission is to open doors to imagination, knowledge, connection, and discovery; a mission made possible by the continued support of our local voters.

While I appreciate the intent behind HB 137 to promote coordination and fiscal transparency among taxing authorities, I believe the bill, in its current form, creates several serious risks to local control, library governance, and voter access.

1. It removes the right of voters to decide.

Under existing law, library boards (which are comprised of trustees appointed by county commissioners and common pleas judges) are accountable to their communities and empowered to determine when to seek a levy. Voters then have the ultimate authority to decide whether to fund that request.

House Bill 137 would alter that balance by allowing a taxing authority to block a levy request from reaching the ballot, preventing voters from weighing in on a question that directly affects their local services. Such a restriction moves away from one of the core principles of our democratic system: that citizens should have the opportunity to make informed decisions about their community's future through the ballot box.

2. It undermines library board autonomy.

Ohio law already provides a clear and balanced framework for how public libraries are governed and funded. Under Ohio Revised Code Sections 3375.32 through 3375.36, library boards of trustees are established as **independent governing bodies** responsible for the management of library operations, property, and finances.

These statutes also authorize library boards to determine when a levy is needed and to place that question directly before the voters. This long-standing structure reflects a strong tradition of local accountability and trust between the community, its trustees, and the electorate.

House Bill 137 would modify that balance by introducing an additional layer of approval not contemplated in current law. While the goal of improving coordination is understandable, it is important to preserve the intent of these statutes, ensuring that trustees can responsibly assess community needs and that voters retain the opportunity to make the final decision at the ballot box.

3. It threatens the stability of essential services.

At the Delaware County District Library, our local levy provides more than 75% of our operating budget. Those funds support literacy programs for children and adults, access to technology and digital resources, and extended service hours that keep our doors open when working families need us most. Even a delay or denial in that process could interrupt essential funding and limit our ability to maintain the consistent, high-quality service our community depends on.

4. It creates inconsistency across multi-county systems.

Many library systems, including ours, serve residents across multiple jurisdictions. For example, a single library district may include portions of several municipalities or even multiple counties, each with its own taxing authority. Under HB 137, if one of those jurisdictions were to withhold approval for a levy, it could prevent voters in the other areas—who also benefit from and help fund the library—from even having the opportunity to vote.

This creates an inequitable situation where one governmental body could effectively overrule the will of residents in another, despite all being served by the same public institution. Such a dynamic not only undermines local representation but also raises potential constitutional concerns about equal access to the ballot and uniform treatment of voters across district lines. Libraries exist to unite communities, not to be caught between competing political boundaries, and HB 137 would unintentionally introduce that conflict.

I respectfully urge this committee to reject HB 137 in its current form, but if it continues forward, please consider these amendments to safeguard community participation while achieving the bill's transparency goals:

1. Protect the right of voters to decide.

Allow taxing authorities to provide a non-binding advisory opinion or fiscal analysis, but prohibit them from preventing a levy from reaching the ballot.

2. Address multi-jurisdictional districts.

Specify that no single county or municipality may veto a levy for a district that serves multiple jurisdictions.

3. Add an appeals process or third-party review.

If disagreement occurs, refer the issue to the County Budget Commission or State Auditor rather than giving unilateral veto power to one entity.

4. Include a sunset provision.

Require a 3-year review to assess the impact on voter participation and local funding stability.

Ohio's public libraries are among the most trusted and efficient institutions in state government. We already operate under rigorous public oversight through state audits, budget commissions, and open board meetings. We welcome collaboration and transparency, but we cannot support legislation that removes the community's voice or weakens the independence that has made Ohio's libraries national leaders in accountability and service.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask this committee to oppose House Bill 137 or, at a minimum, amend it to preserve local control, voter access, and the integrity of library governance.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Bryan Howard
Director
Delaware County District Library